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DE RUEHIL #3398/01 3020916

ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9508
INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 3519
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 5017
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 9310
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 8964
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3944
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 5912
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0521
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 6257
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 5093
RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHWSMRC/USCINCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 003398

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/28/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER EAID PK

SUBJECT: QURESHI TALKS TO BOUCHER ABOUT FRIENDS AND OPPONENTS

REF: ISLAMABAD 2441

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Assistant Secretary Boucher met Foreign Minister Qureshi late October 20. Qureshi was appreciative of the effort put into the "Friends of Pakistan." He hoped the initiative would be more than "just a donors' group," and informed Boucher that an action plan was with President Zardari. He also welcomed greater participation in the group by Saudi Arabia and China, but was uncertain about involving the U.N. Qureshi stated that Zardari's recent trip to China had focused on trade. Qureshi was open to Boucher's suggestion to "structure" Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan, which had weathered recent storms, the Foreign Minister believed. Turning to the current debate in parliament on his government's national counterterrorism strategy, Qureshi warned against trusting the opposition's claimed interest in reaching a consensus. Nawaz Sharif's public actions contradicted his private characterizations, Qureshi argued. Instead, Nawaz wanted to talk to the Taliban a course already rejected by Qureshi and the current coalition, the Foreign Minister said. End Summary.

Friends of Pakistan

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¶2. (C) Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher and the Ambassador met late October 20 with Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi. The Foreign Minister opened by expressing his government's enthusiasm and appreciation for the "Friends of Pakistan" initiative. He stressed that the group be, as well as be viewed as, "more than just a donor group."

¶3. (C) Qureshi agreed with Boucher that this engagement was an opportunity for Pakistan to list what it specifically needs and informed Boucher that an action plan had been passed up to President Zardari. Qureshi looked forward to ambassador-level preparatory meetings in Islamabad, leading up to a ministerial-level meeting in Abu Dhabi in mid-November. Without providing details, Qureshi referred to four parts of a security development program.

¶4. (C) Qureshi was pleased that the Saudis had participated in the "Friends" forum earlier the same day; their presence would be helpful. He voiced surprise that the Saudis had

pulled back after the initial meeting of the group in New York. Qureshi claimed to have convinced China to participate in "Friends" and recognized the next hurdle was to have them play a core role. Boucher said the Chinese may prefer to focus on bilateral engagement and had been cautious throughout this process.

¶ 15. (C) The Foreign Minister was suspicious of a role for the U.N. Though he recognized the value of having the U.N. Secretary General's "Good Offices" support this "Friends" initiative, he admitted his disappointment with the organization, which he believed ignored Pakistan's request for an official investigation of Benazir Bhutto's assassination. He also wanted to avoid the appearance that Pakistan had become a "basket case," needing a special office for its problems.

Neighbors

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¶ 16. (C) Qureshi commented that Zardari's recent trip to China had gone well. Both sides had focused on their trade relationship.

¶ 17. (C) He felt Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan had improved under the current government. The increasing interaction between Zardari and Karzai was a "positive dynamic," and his own foreign ministers' relationship had gotten both countries through difficult incidents. Qureshi noted that, for the sake of progress, he had avoided any

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negative statements during these delicate moments. Both sides' bigger worry, he believed, was antagonism within their domestic constituencies. Boucher suggested that the two countries build on this good start: create a structure for regular meetings, channel their interests, and coordinate their actions and messages.

Nawaz

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¶ 18. (C) Qureshi commented on the letter his government had just received from opposition party leader Nawaz Sharif outlining six points for a national counterterrorism strategy (septel). Qureshi admitted he had not seen the document but had been informed of its parts. Boucher added that, in his own meeting with the opposition, Nawaz had characterized the document as a basis on which to build consensus. Qureshi mistrusted this characterization, adding that Nawaz's statements in public and supporters' remarks in parliament were instead antagonist. He believed Nawaz had not yet decided whether to engage the government or more aggressively take on its ruling Pakistan People's Party.

¶ 19. (C) But Qureshi thought the parliamentary debate about the government's plans to fight terrorism was healthy and historical. Never before had the Director General of Military Operations briefed parliament, much less stand before it for four hours to answer pointed questions. This is "not a minor thing." He implied controversy was expected by the government, but that the decision had been made to "let people vent" and to "see if they would be willing to say publicly what they said in private."

¶ 10. (C) Qureshi was adamant that his party would stay in coalition with Nawaz's party in the Punjab provincial government, providing stability to Pakistan's largest province, he argued. Qureshi claimed his Pakistan People's Party could have aligned with the other opposition party, Pakistan Muslim League, and taken control of the province, but this would have caused a level of political clashes not seen since the 1990s, he argued.

Peace Accords

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¶11. (C) Qureshi was adamant that peace accords with the frontier region's militants had not worked in the past. He was certain that coalition partners Awami National Party (ANP) and Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) were on board. He agreed with Boucher's formulation that the government should continue to "fight the people who want to fight us."

¶12. (U) Assistant Secretary Boucher has cleared this cable.

PATTERSON